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MOMENTUM 2026 TOPIC: EXPANDING CHOICES FOR BOARD MODELS

(Updated 3.1.26)

Fundamental Realities

Most of the way most boards function (for-profit, non-profit, in the United States, and in many other countries) is not dictated in detail by law, but rather mostly by norms, habits, and traditional “best practices.” In the United States, the Internal Revenue Service requirements are minimal: generally, depending on the state, the requirements are that a board must exist, it must meet once a year, file paperwork, and include at least three people. Legal obligations are relatively narrow, often covered in many ways through having Directors & Officers insurance. In many cases the board is primarily the legal custodian of an organization’s assets, stepping in if staff leadership were ever to dissolve or completely depart.

Current Norms and Challenges

The prevailing US nonprofit board models—founding, working, governing, or fundraising boards—tend to come with layers of needed onboarding and training, committee structures, use of Robert’s Rules, and assumptions about what the most important qualifications are to board participation (often love of the current activities, and ability/commitment to provide financial resources). While these systems are deeply ingrained, they often do not align with what organizations truly need, and can fail to fulfill the core role of the board, or can be a drag on the delivery of the organization’s purpose more than a support to it.

In practice, the formal, ‘standard’ US nonprofit board model often works most smoothly with the largest, wealthiest boards with significant civic power and staff support. For

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other organizations, especially those with paid staff but modest resources, or in specific unique circumstances, the mismatch of responsibilities and capacity often leads to frustration and conflict. In recent years there are numerous examples of how crisis moments for organizations have illuminated that many boards are ill-equipped to handle critical issues or moments.

Given the limited fundamental requirements for how boards function, we collectively have many more choices than we think we do when it comes to boards. Board structures can be reconceived in ways that build trust and strengthen relationships, and that are more effective in support, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs, all without requiring changes to laws or significant new resources.

No one model is a 'silver bullet' that will work for every group of people, organization, or community. What can be most helpful to all of us is an expanded palette of approaches to ownership, governance, oversight, support, and collaboration.

Through MOMENTUM 2026, we will gather hundreds of diverse and experienced creators, innovators, and builders in communities far and wide to identify, develop, and detail more choices that we can all utilize going forward. The Momentum 2026 Sourcebook, found online at MomentumRevolutions.com, will be a repository for both examples of other board or leadership models and all the ideas and contributions added to this discussion from June to September 2026.

Initial Contributions

A few examples that MOMENTUM contributors have already put on the table for exploration include:

Licensing or Certification Boards: A system where board members in a community receive consistent training and certification, creating trust in governance and potentially reducing compliance burdens from partner funders.

Focused Boards: A small group of three to five people handles only legal obligations such as budget signoff, executive oversight, and legal compliance. These members may be recruited for their expertise and compensated. Other common responsibilities

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are delegated to ambassador, fundraising, or advocacy groups without legal oversight roles.

Partner Boards: Instead of sitting “above” staff, this body operates as a self-contained partner, similar to common ‘partner’ foundations that steward endowments or buildings or ‘partner’ volunteer organizations like ushers or promotional groups, with mutual obligations and accountability flowing in both directions.

Holistic Organizations: In this model the distinction between staff, board, and artists is intentionally blurred. Everyone is part of one team, with shared agreements, expectations, and compensation. Certain members as part of their ‘job’ take on legal sign-off responsibilities.

Community Accountability Boards: An independent oversight group of finance, legal, and community leaders, possibly supported by funders or civic groups, that can provide efficiency and consistency across multiple organizations. Each organization maintains its own advocacy, donor, or ambassador groups.

Leadership Boards: Members devote focused, part-time leadership in specific areas such as finance, development, or partnerships, going far beyond traditional advisory roles.

Moving Forward

These emerging models demonstrate that governance does not need to remain locked into a singular approach. There is wide room for experimentation, and the potential to build systems that align with actual organizational needs, foster stronger relationships, and reflect the creativity of our people and communities.

The goal of MOMENTUM 2026 is to illuminate and detail at least twenty different approaches to this topic, if not more, and then for contributors and supporters to carry those ideas out for piloting, adaptation, and implementation.